DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 021 CE 054 943

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TITLE Leading Them to Water and Making Them Drink. Some Thoughts on Why Training Works (and Doesn't Always Work).
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Corporate Education; *Educational Attitudes; *Instructional Effectiveness; *On the Job Training; Organizational Climate; Participant Satisfaction; Postsecondary Education; Quality of Working Life; Student Attitudes; *Values; *Work Environment; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Organizational Culture

ABSTRACT

Making training work has always been a critical issue and will become more important in the coming decades. Definitions of effective training range from training that promotes growth and enthusiasm among employees to a bottom-line approach with emphasis on whether the training makes employees produce more. Variables that affect training include appropriateness of the subject matter, instructional personnel, and corporate attitude toward training and education. A study explored the impact of one variable, organizational attitudes, on learning in organization-sponsored workshops. Employees of two organizations attended identical workshops on microcomputers, conducted by the same instructors. Both groups of employees had similar demographic and educational characteristics. Students (63 from one organization and 138 from the other) responded to an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the workshop. To examine the differences between the two groups, a t-test of means was used for each item on the evaluation questionnaire. Responses for the content item were significantly higher for one of the groups. The difference was attributed to the organizational value systems or corporate culture of the two organizations. One organization failed to communicate the high value it placed on the program to employees, and the workshop was not directly linked to the job rewards emphasized by management. The other organization had conveyed attitudes of the value of education as an end in itself, and its employees gave a higher rating to the content of the workshops. The study suggests that the effectiveness of training depends on the organizational values that are transmitted to employees and internalized by them prior to training. (KC)

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Leading them to water and making them drink
Some thoughts on why training works (and doesn't always work)

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April, 1990

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The old chestnut says that you can "lead a horse to water, but you can't make 'em drink". Much the same thing can be said about adult learners and in-service workshops. In other words, just getting employees into workshops (and away from their desks, special projects and the telephone) does not necessarily mean that they will derive any benefit from having attended it. In some cases, workshops are very successful, students leave the workshop with a strong sense of having learned something valuable and can hardly wait to return to the workplace to put it to use. For others, workshops vary from being a "pleasant interlude"[1] to a thorough waste of their time, the instructor's time and the organization's resources. For some, there is an attitude that the workshop only serves as a means to introduce "something more" that "they", the unknown upper levels of management, want the already underpaid and overworked employees to do. While almost all organizations (business, government, the military, education, etc.) have some form of in-service training or continuing education program, the effectiveness of this training, in terms of increased production, more efficient operation, or making work more meaningful or rewarding fluctuates from organization to organization. Indeed, the efficacy of training and education may fluctuate wildly from location to location within organizations.

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[1]This was an actual written comment provided by an adult learner at the end of a two-day workshop on interpersonal relationships provided to a government social services agency.

Making training work has always been a critical issue and will become more important in the coming decades. During the latter half of the 1980s a great deal of training effort was spent in the computerization of the workforce, especially in the service sector. That particular wave, however, has been crested. Existing adult workers have largely become "computer literate" and, generally, new generations now entering the workforce have already acquired computer literacy skills, as part of their former educational experience.

However, the need for training continues and will play an even greater role in the future. More technologically oriented organizations, such as Polaroid have programs in place that provide employees with the technical skills required for their careers (Castronovo-Fusco, 1989). Beyond technology, in-service training of a broader nature will play an expanded role because of the changing nature of the workforce (Russell, 1989). Thus, the question of why is some training effective and other training not is one of critical importance.

What is Effective Training?

Effective training means training that works. Employees return to work better able to perform tasks associated with their job. It may mean taking new methods of performing old jobs to heart and implementing new routines. In some cases, it may mean that enthusiasm of employees for task completion is heightened and there is a greater sense of work satisfaction. Non-effective training, rather than promoting growth, tends to promote a "sabotage syndrome" among employees. New methods and techniques

are not implemented and old routines adhered to. In that event, training has been less than effective. In fact the training may have been detrimental in that further efforts at implementing change will only come about through authoritarian actions by management ("My way or the highway!").

For some organizations, training that works takes in a very limited view, what we might call the "gas station model". That is, the student comes to class, the instructor unscrews the top of their head, pours the knowledge in, screws the top back on and sends the students on their merry way back to work. The effectiveness of the training is based upon management's evaluation of the "octane rating" of the course content: does it cover all bases? are all the commands covered? are all contingencies planned for? can I put my employees in this new situation and have them ready to fire on all cylinders? will they produce more? Bell and Kerr (1987) in their discussion of evaluating training programs emphasize this bottom line to the organization approach.

This view, however, takes a somewhat limited, organization-centered approach to training and notions of effectiveness. A more overarching view of effective training goes beyond this strict bottom line emphasis. While skill acquisition and enhancement are important, these somewhat objective measures of whether or not training works gloss over some very important, somewhat more subjective aspects of training. In a study of 263 adult learners, Nordhaug (1989) found four major benefit areas perceived by employees who had participated in organization sponsored training: learning motivation,

self-actualization, and increases in self-confidence and occupational mobility. Significantly, skill acquisition was not one of the major perceived benefits.

In other words, training that works should provide benefits not only to the organization in the form of objective measures such as skills and productivity but, as well, subjective benefits to the employee. Effective training should be viewed as a two-way street where the rewards for the employee are as great as the rewards for the employer.

Variables Affecting Training

Certain variables obviously impact the specific training efforts in an organization. Obviously, appropriateness of the subject matter plays a major role. For example, you don't send the cleaning staff to an engineering seminar just because you promised them training opportunities. Similarly, Wehrenberg (1989) suggests that confusion of mission may hinder effectiveness of training. That is, confusion between orientation and training as goals can weaken the effectiveness of a workshop. Focus upon one or the other but don't mix them.

Another well documented variable which affects training is the instructional personnel. Given the same curricular content, different instructors will be more effective with different people. The "technical star" may have such poor interpersonal skills that what should be an interesting and exciting workshop will become, instead, a monotonous nightmare for those involved. On the other hand, the "cheerleader" may be perceived by

students as being a dilettante and lacking the depth of knowledge to adequately convey the technical message of the workshop.

Yet another variable which seems to play a major role in the effectiveness of training is the corporate attitude toward training and education. In a Sloan School of Management Study, Linda Morris (1989) examined computerization at two different firms. Her conclusion, in studying these two firms is that "The gains that a company realizes...reflect the expectations of the company's management." (Morris, 1989, 83). Where management had transmitted high expectations and goals for computerization, employees responded positively. In the other company, management conveyed a somewhat less than enthusiastic attitude and only "modest expectations" (Morris, 1989, 82). Similarly, Grant (1989) suggests that a major strategy for successful training is employee motivation.

What both of these studies suggest is that a major variable in the success of learning and adaptation is the organizational expectations of training which are transmitted to employees. Employees are sensitive to organizational attitudes and expectations and either live up or live down to them. Thus expectations for a particular workshop or training session grow directly from and reflect organizational attitudes toward education. In this paper, we explore the impact of this one particular variable, organizational attitudes, and their impact on learning in organizational sponsored workshops.

Background and Data Collection

Over the course of 1988 and 1989, employees of two organizations attended the same workshop. One of the organizations was a large state agency (hereafter denoted Organization A), the other was the regional facility of a private, service organization (hereafter referred to as Organization B). The workshop the employees attended was a twelve-hour seminar entitled "Introduction to Microcomputers". For Organization A, the workshop was conducted on-site as a two-day workshop; for Organization B, it was conducted on-site as a series of four three-hour sessions. In both cases, students were given a combination of lecture, computer-based tutorials and hands-on exercises. For both sets of workshops, the same instructors were used, following the same curriculum guide. At the end of the workshop, each student was asked to complete a course evaluation.

The evaluation instrument (see Appendix 1) was an eight question Likert-scaled form. Students were asked to circle the appropriate response to each of the eight items and provide any written comments as well. All evaluations were anonymous. Questions on the form addressed issues related to the teacher's ability and style (effectiveness, preparation, openness, responsiveness), an evaluation of the course content, and a self-assessment of the information the student learned and its relationship to their perceived job effectiveness. The responses of 63 students in Organization A and 138 students in Organization B are the basic data for this paper.

Demographically, the two populations are nearly identical. For Organization A, the average age was 37.96 years and the average education was 12.78 years. The

employees of Organization B had an average age of 41.01 years and an average educational attainment of 13.16 years. A t-test of means showed that the difference between the populations on these two factors was not significant. Occupationally, both populations consisted largely of clerical support and technical and administrative support personnel with only a small proportion of technical (engineering) personnel. Employees in both groups had little or no prior exposure to the content of the workshop (use of microcomputers). The only noted difference between the populations was the sexual composition of the two populations: Organization B had a higher percentage of female employees.

Analysis

To examine the differences between the two groups, a t-test of means was used for each of the items on the evaluation questionnaire. A comparison of the mean scores on eight items is shown in Table 1.[2] Earlier research using this same evaluation instrument (Duffy, 1988) indicates that the items on the form fall into two distinct groupings for students. Questions six, seven and eight form a distinct "Content" factor and questions one through five form a distinct "Instructor" factor (Duffy, 1988, 15-16). Since the same instructors were used in both sets of workshops, it is not unexpected that there are no significant differences to the responses on the "Instructor" items from both

[2]A ninth item, "Overall, I feel that I am able to perform my job more effectively as a result of this course." was omitted from the analysis. It was not used on the evaluations performed by Organization B.

groups of students, with the exceptions of question 1 ("The teacher was effective in relating the material to my job responsibilities") and question 3 ("The teacher allowed for student participation in class").

What is important for this paper, though, is the fact that the mean responses on the "Content" items (6, 7, & 8) are significantly higher for Organization B, despite the same instructional techniques and the same course content.

	Org. A	Org. B
Ques 1	4.131	4.403*
Ques 2	4.601	4.714
Ques 3	4.572	4.790*
Ques 4	4.404	4.587
Ques 5	4.855	4.758
Ques 6	3.928	4.242*
Ques 7	4.319	4.683*
Ques 8	4.123	4.524*

*Difference in means significant at .01 on two-tailed t-test

Table 1.

Comparison of Mean Scores

Discussion

From the results of the t-test, it is obvious that some intervening variable, not accounted for, has had a definite impact on the evaluations provided by the employees of Organization B. In this analysis, all of the typical variables have been, in effect, held constant. As we have seen, the two groups are largely identical, with the exception of gender distribution, on all attributes which may have affected their learning. The instructor-style variable was held constant since the same two instructors led both sets of workshops. In fact, the percentage of sessions led by both instructors was virtually identical for the workshops held for each of the organizations. Content and workshop style were also identical. What then, can we say has created a difference, especially in the students' perception of learning, between these two organizations?

The difference lies in the organizational value systems or "corporate culture" as it applies to education and in-service training. Within Organization A, management placed a high value on the training program, considering it complimentary to their investment in office automation. However, the value was not successfully transmitted to employees. Within this organization, in-service education, in general, is directly linked to the reward structure of the organization in terms of salary increases and changes in job-classification grade. This attitude or value has been internalized by the employees. However, the computer training employees received was not specifically linked, by organizational management with the regular reward system; that is, completing the series of workshops did not mean a salary increase or grade change. Without the explicit linkage employees

had come to expect, most employees did not place as high a value on the computer training as did management. Many students, in their oral and written comments, echoed a view that computerization represented another layer of work imposed upon the local offices by the central office.

The end result, was that students failed to perceive the type of overarching rewards for themselves that Nordhaug (1988) alludes to (see above). Instead, employees of Organization A, in keeping with the norms transmitted by management, and self-internalized, viewed this training as only meeting the needs of the organization. Since the typical forms of educational motivation (salary increase or grade change) were not directly linked to the training, perceptions of the value were diminished. For many students, the training was considered an arduous and burdensome chore rather than rewarding and exciting, and offering an opportunity for personal growth.

Organization B, on the other hand, had inculcated a distinctly different set of attitudes regarding the value of education. Education is viewed by this organization as an end in itself, a means of self-improvement. While continued education may at some level be linked to the organization's salary and grade structure, as a more general goal, employees are motivated to learn and given learning opportunities as a means of self improvement which will, ultimately, generate rewards for the organization. Even though the computer training was not linked to some reward structure, the employees of Organization B, having internalized the organization's attitude regarding the worth of education, displayed distinctly higher self-evaluations of learning.

Perhaps the most telling point which illustrates the motivational differences between the two organizations is the scheduling of the workshops. In Organization A, workshops were scheduled as two-day affairs where employees were released from their duties and sent to the workshop sites at organizational expense. This meant, from a productivity standpoint, the organization was incurring costs beyond that of the cost of the workshop. While the management of Organization A placed a high value on this program, the employees did not share this value. At break periods, employees retreated to their offices, intent on not "being behind" in their work routine.

The employees of Organization B, however, attended the workshops on their own time. Scheduling was done to permit individuals from different shifts to attend the sessions either before or after their regular work. Yet, the employees of Organization B exhibited significantly higher evaluations on the content items. They felt that they had learned more, generally, and, specifically (as indicated by the differences in means on item 1), they learned more as it related to their functions within the organization. At break time and after class, students generally stayed near the classroom to talk with the instructor. They viewed this as an opportunity to interact directly with the instructor and learn more or have specific questions answered.

Conclusions

What makes training work? Laurie (1988) posits that when employees are not putting training to work, the fault lies with the training department. The research discussed in this paper seems to indicate that a greater factor is the organizational values

which are transmitted to employees and which, in turn, are internalized by them prior to any training. When the organizational value is one which directly and explicitly links training to reward structure, any training, to be effective, must be geared to this notion. Training or educational opportunities which have more transcendent goals, such as improving the quality of the work experience or making it more interesting to the employees is not effective because of the employees perceptions of organizational values. Without the linkage of education equals specific rewards, employees have a low perception of the value of the educational opportunity. In other words, "why attend and pay attention when I'm not going to get a pay increase?"

Training works consistently better when the organization places a high intrinsic value on education, whether specifically linked to reward structure or not. This value, when internalized by employees, produces greater motivation to learn and to appreciate the idea of knowledge for the sake of personal growth.

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Appendix 1.

Evaluation Instrument

COURSE EVALUATION

NAME OF COURSE:
LOCATION:
INSTRUCTOR: Date:

Please answer the following questions by circling one of the following responses:

Excellent	Very Good	Average	Fair	Poor
5	4	3	2	1

1) The teacher was effective in relating the material to my job responsibilities. 5 4 3 2 1

2) The teacher presented lectures in a clear and concise manner. 5 4 3 2 1

3) The teacher allowed for student participation in class. 5 4 3 2 1

4) The teacher was open to suggestions by students 5 4 3 2 1

5) The teacher was always prepared for class. 5 4 3 2 1

6) I usually understood the material presented. 5 4 3 2 1

7) I benefitted from the lectures given by the teacher insofar as they made the subject matter more comprehensible. 5 4 3 2 1

8) Overall, I feel that I have learned a great deal in this course. 5 4 3 2 1

9) Overall, I feel that I am able to perform my job more effectively as a result of this course. 5 4 3 2 1

Please add any additional comments about the course and suggestions that you may have for its improvement.